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THE

GENERAL JUDGMENT:

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SERMON.

BY

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GENERAL JUDGMENT.

ROMANS i. verse 18.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

THE great aim of every Christian Minister should be in imitation of his divine Master, to call sinners to repentance and newness of life. And to this purpose he should enforce his exhortations, not only with the promises, but also with the threatenings of the gospel. They indeed who wish to live at ease in their sins, and to put the evil day far from them, condemn this last method of preaching, as cruel and unmerciful, and fit only to make men melancholy, and to drive them to despair.

But why should it be thought cruel or unmerciful, or in any respect improper, to endeavour to alarm the guilty with a sense of their danger? Did not Christ, the great fountain of love and mercy, use this method? Hath he not described in the most awful terms, the torments reserved for the ungodly in a future state? Does he not urge us to deny our sinful inclinations by the fear of *that worm that never dieth, and of that fire that shall never be quenched*? And does he not repeatedly tell us, that a wicked life will sink us in those regions of horror and despair, where nothing is heard but wailing, weeping, and gnashing of teeth? The Apostles in like manner, even in those epistles, where they are delivering the joyful message of salvation by a Redeemer, do yet frequently declare, that God will punish in the most exemplary manner, all those rebellious creatures, who, by still continuing in their evil ways, slight the pardon, which he offers them. The text is one instance of this sort, amidst a multitude that

might be produced, and serves to shew us, that however merciful the Lord is to them that seek him, yet is he just and holy, and will by no means suffer his laws to be broken with impunity.

The wrath of God, says the Apostle, is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness: i. e. God hath given us the amplest assurances that sin is an abomination to him, and will, of course, bring upon us the worst of evils: that all impiety and profaneness towards God, and all acts of malice and injustice towards man, particularly in those who hold the truth in unrighteousness, (i. e. who know the right and do the wrong) will subject men to the heaviest of God's judgments.

These important particulars the Almighty has been pleased to make known us in a variety of ways.

1. By the light of nature. Reason itself teaches, that he who communicates life and happiness to such an infinite number of creatures, must do it from a principle of disinterested love and goodness; that therefore a being so good and gracious ought to be loved, revered and obeyed, and that those ungrateful wretches who do otherwise, justly deserve to feel his displeasure. Hence the most virtuous heathens, who were destitute of every other guide in these matters, but the light of nature, have always entertained some confused notions of a kind of heaven and hell; the former as the receptacle of the pious and good, and the *latter* as a place of punishment for those, who despised the worship of the Gods, and who injured and oppressed their fellow creatures. And though their opinion of these matters may in several particulars appear extremely absurd, and even ridiculous to us, who enjoy the clear light of God's word, yet it shews upon the whole, that the doctrine of the text is no more than what natural reason teaches, viz. that vengeance in the most dreadful form will one day overtake all the workers of iniquity.

2. This doctrine is farther confirmed by the constitution of things in the present state. For notwithstanding that in several cases there be one event to the just and to the unjust; yet we know assuredly, that as righteousness tendereth unto life, so he that pursueth evil, pursueth

it unto his own destruction. A course of virtue, whatever difficulties may attend it, will, upon the whole, make us happier than we could otherwise be in the present life; and will also prepare us for those joys that are eternal in the next. The path of the just, however intricate or dark it may be for a while, will keep gradually opening, and like the sun emerging from a gloomy fog, through which it has waded for some time, will at last burst forth in all the beauty and splendour of the perfect day. The path of vice is just the reverse of this. However smooth or inviting it may at first appear, yet as you advance in it, it becomes more and more rugged, perplexed, and painful, till at last it end in everlasting horror and darkness. By the natural constitution of things, pain treads so closely in the steps of every forbidden pleasure, that you may as reasonably hope to take fire into your bosom, and not be burnt by it, as to be happy while you indulge iniquity of any sort in your heart. By thus connecting misery with vice, and making every transgression of the divine law carry its own punishment along with it, God has sufficiently testified his displeasure against sin, and warned every man to avoid it not only as an enemy to his eternal peace, but as the source of the worst evils, that can befall him in his present state. But

3. Another way, in which the Lord hath declared his abhorrence of sin, and his intention to punish it, is by the revelation of his holy will in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament. There he assures us in the most express terms, that *sin shall not go unpunished*, that the curse of heaven rests upon the ungodly and the unjust: that they who despise their Maker, shall be lightly esteemed: that *there is no peace to the wicked*: that *the face of the Lord is against them that do evil*: and that *the wicked shall be turned into hell, even all the nations that forget God*. All this we gather from the writings of the Old Testament. But the same doctrine is still more forcibly delivered in the new. There we are told that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, and give to every one according to his deeds; in consequence of which the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. To add to the solemnity of this important day, the Lord Jesus

Christ is represented as descending from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not his gospel, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his Saints, and to be admired of all them that believe. The gospel likewise informs us, that the pain of body, and anguish of soul, to be then inflicted upon the ungodly, shall be so exquisitely intolerable, that they shall desire but in vain, to throw themselves into the arms of death as a refuge from their torments; yea, that they shall, in wild despair, call to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, and hide them for ever from the most terrible of all sights, the Fountain of Mercy, who should have been their deliverer, become, by their own fault, their inexorable judge.

The persons on whom this vengeance shall fall, are, as the text informs us, the ungodly and unrighteous of every denomination, and particularly those who hold the truth in unrighteousness, and who stifle and resist the voice of conscience enforced by the word of God. Accordingly we read, Rev. xxi. that the fearful, and unbelievers, and abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and all liars, shall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. 1 Cor. vi. St. Paul declares, that no sort of unrighteous person, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor revilers, nor drunkards, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. And again, Eph. v. the same Apostle cautions us that we be not misled by the sophistry of designing men, into a notion that there is little or no harm in such things; Let no man deceive you (says he) with vain words, for whatever wicked men may say, (or whatever your own deceitful hearts may suggest to the contrary,) it is because of these things that the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience. Again, John iii. we are told, that as he who believeth on the Son of God hath life, even a divine life, which enabling him to have his fruit unto holiness here, becomes the pledge and foretaste of everlasting life hereafter; so he who believeth not, but is disobedient to the heavenly call, is so far from see-

ing life, that the wrath of God abideth on him: i. e. he continues un sanctified and unchanged in heart and life, the wretched slave of sin and Satan, (the enemy of God by evil works,) and of course obnoxious to the worst evils, which the word of God hath denounced against impenitent sinners. And once more, in the 2d chapter of this same epistle from whence the text is taken, the Apostle assures us, that as on one hand to them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will give eternal life; so on the other hand upon them, who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, he will pour out indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish. And lest any one inwardly unholy and impure should rely upon his outward privileges as a defence against the divine judgments, the Apostle farther assures us, that this vengeance shall, without respect of persons, be inflicted upon *every soul of man that doth evil*, whether Jew or Gentile, whether bled with evangelical light, or sunk in heathenish darkness. Each will be judged according to the dispensation he enjoyed; and so far will the name of Christ be from profiting those that have lived unworthy of it, that they will be beaten with many stripes, as the servants who knew their Lord's will, and did it not. Thus you see the dreadful things with which the word of God threatens presumptuous sinners, and it should be observed that all these denunciations of evil (so far as we have room to expect the completion of them in this life) stand awfully verified by the history and experience of all ages.

Disobedience to a divine command banished our first parents from Paradise, and subjected them, and their posterity, to evils that we should otherwise never have known. A general depravity of manners brought an universal deluge upon the world of the ungodly. The detestable practices of the inhabitants of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* provoked God to destroy them and their cities, by a storm of fire and brimstone from heaven; and to make their country a standing monument to this day, of his displeasure against sin. The overthrow of the Egyptian hosts in the Red Sea: the excision of the Canaanitish nations: the various and heavy judgments that overtook the disobedient Israelites, and the calamities

that are, to this day, pursuing their unhappy descendants, for the rejection of Christ: the temporal calamities which wilful wickedness brings upon individuals, and which themselves in most cases may see to be the natural punishment of their sins: the sudden and shameful downfall of those who have exalted themselves by fraud and oppression: the surprising discoveries of murder, and other atrocious crimes, that had been committed with the greatest secrecy; and the horrors and agonies of mind, which generally seize presumptuous sinners of every sort, when death threatens to introduce them into the presence of a long forgotten God. All these things, I say, plainly prove that the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, and that the denunciations of his word are by no means empty threats. We have already seen a number of them, in the above instances, awfully verified, and may from thence conclude, that the whole will, in due time, be made good.

And now having shewn you, from reason, experience, and the word of God, that iniquity of every sort will subject men to the worst evils, both in time and eternity, I shall next apply what has been said, as briefly as the importance of the subject will admit. And

1. If the wrath of God must sooner or later fall upon every soul of man that doth evil, then let each of us ask his own heart, upon what grounds he hopes to escape it. Let conscience speak. Are you the children of God by faith in Christ, and newness of life; or does your ungodliness and wicked works proclaim you the children of the devil? If the former, you are safe, and no evil shall approach to hurt you. The Almighty God will be your guide, your guardian, and your everlasting reward. But if you are the wretched slaves of sin and Satan, and resolved to continue such, notwithstanding that deliverance which the Son of God offers you; then be assured that nothing can save you from the destruction which slumbereth not, and which, like a pointed sword suspended by a hair, hangs continually over your guilty heads. The marks by which the word of God distinguishes the heirs of glory from all others, are such as these: They are renewed in the spirits of their minds: they walk in newness of life: by prayer and praise they maintain a continual and delight-

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ful intercourse with heaven: their fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, they yet love. And as a proof that they do indeed love him, they keep his commandments, carefully avoiding all known sin, and faithfully striving to perfect holiness in the fear of God: they are moreover meek and lowly in their own eyes, tender hearted and forgiving towards others, true and just in their dealings, and temperate in their enjoyments. And lastly, They are careful to cherish in their hearts, and to exhibit in their lives, that spirit of unfeigned love towards all men, which Christ enjoins as the only sure proof that we are his genuine disciples.

Ask your hearts then, Have you experienced any thing like this? Has the gospel produced any change in you for the better? Do you delight to approach God in his holy ordinances? Can you address the Lord in the words of David, and say from your heart, Through thy commandments I get understanding, therefore do I hate every evil way. The law of thy mouth is sweeter to me than thousands of gold and silver. Thou art my portion, O Lord! the desire of my heart, and what my soul longeth for, as its supreme good! Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire in comparison of thee, and of those joys which the light of thy countenance gives? If this be the case, you have room to believe yourself in the number of those happy souls, who, resting on the Rock of Ages, shall stand secure, when the earth, and all the works that are therein, are buried in their own ruins, and shall even look forward with joy to that awful day, that completes the perdition of ungodly men.

But what if this should not be the case? what if conscience place you among those impious wretches, who hold the truth in unrighteousness? So far from casting off the works of darkness, you perhaps hate to be reformed, and, like many others, rejoice in iniquity. You are, it may be, as great a slave to your sensual appetites, as intemperate and debauched, as malicious, implacable, unmerciful, and worldly-minded, as those on whom the light of Christianity never shone. And if so, it is very plain that you are yet in your sins, and that Christ will profit you nothing. You are the children of the devil, the enemies of righteousness, and the very persons against

whom all the threatenings of the law, and of the gospe are pointed. Consider therefore, in the

2. Place, The terror of your situation. You have rebelled against God, your heavenly Father, and best Benefactor; you have despised a Saviour's love, and rejected that dear-bought salvation which he offers you: you have done despite to the spirit of grace, by hardening your heart against his impressions. In short, you have rejected happiness and chosen misery. You have preferred the drudgery of sin to the service of God, and by so doing have incurred the displeasure of him that made you. And now, how will you be able to endure that wrath of God, which is about to fall upon you for such wickedness? think how many ways an Almighty Being has to punish his guilty creatures. He need but withdraw his supporting hand, and there is an end of you. He need but speak the word, and the most painful and loathsome diseases shall become the ministers of his vengeance. The very food you eat, and the air you breathe, are just what he pleases to make them, the support of life, or the cause of death. Every outward comfort you enjoy is at his disposal. He can deprive you of them in a moment; or he can continue them, and make them the source of much unhappiness. Nay, what is worse, he can set loose an awakened conscience upon you, and make you inwardly and completely wretched amidst every outward advantage. And lastly, He can cast you body and soul into hell, and leave you there a prey to the malignant spirits of darkness. Now you should remember, that while you continue in wilful wickedness of any sort, you actually join the great enemy of mankind against the greatest and best of beings, and by so doing force him, as it were, in spite of his natural benignity, to inflict upon you the worst evils of time and eternity. Your situation then, as a wilful, persevering sinner, is indeed deplorable. You stand upon the very brink of destruction, and know not how soon the dreadful artillery of God's judgments may open upon your defenceless souls. And yet, it may be, that you, like many others, from a principle of unbelief, may flatter yourself with the hope that the Fountain of Love and goodness will not inflict upon you the evils he has threatened, even though you still continue to offend

him. But let not this vain hope deceive you. Hear what the Almighty himself, Deut. xxix. says of such as argue in this manner : If there be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood, i. e. any presumptuous sinner, and it come to pass when he heareth the curses of God's word, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace though I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst, and to run into one sin and debauchery after another, that the Lord will not spare him, but his anger and jealousy shall smoke against that man, being the more provoked, because he presumes upon that mercy which he is continually abusing.

There is only one way then left for you to escape, provided you are so sensible of your danger, as to desire a deliverance from it ; and this is what I wish you, in the third, and last place, to weigh attentively. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the holy scriptures teach us, came down from heaven, on purpose that he might seek and save those souls who had undone themselves by wicked works, and who, by wandering in the paths of the destroyer, had wandered far from God, and from happiness. This compassionate Saviour is farther represented as our mediator, through whom alone we have access to the Father. Peace and pardon, grace and glory, are at his disposal ; and he is not more able than he is willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Now, if you really believe this, and resolve, through the grace offered in the gospel, to break off your sins by repentance, and to walk in newness of life, all will yet be well. This however is upon the supposition that you do it immediately. For it may be you have already sinned to the utmost extent of God's patience and forbearance, and to proceed a step farther in vice, may sink you in irretrievable ruin. Say then, are you resolved forthwith to exchange the delusive pleasures of sin, for the substantial joys which God's favour gives ? Do you indeed desire the salvation of your souls ? and are you determined to submit to the terms upon which it is offered, so as to come unto God by Christ for it ? If you are thus resolved, under divine grace, to begin in the good ways of God, let nothing discourage you from proceeding, neither the greatness of your past transgressions, nor the apprehended

difficulties to which a life of religion may expose you. For as to the *former*, the greatness of your sins; the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, and is indeed the only defence against the terrors of an accusing conscience, and the wrath of an avenging God: and as to the *latter*, the difficulties of religion, be assured, that divine grace will be sufficient for you, and that God, according to his promise, will give you a new heart, new powers and abilities, so that you shall perform with ease, and even with pleasure, those Christian duties, which to the natural man must ever be impracticable. Thus will Christ deliver you both from the power and punishment of your sins, fill you with all joy and peace in believing, and not only save you from the perdition that awaits the ungodly, but exalt you to blessedness unutterable, inconceivable, and that knows no period: for however plain it be from scripture, that the wrath of God will overtake the world of the ungodly, yet are we assured to our comfort, from the same authority, that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. Let us bless God that we have such a Saviour; and while we rejoice in the distinguishing privilege, let us be careful to improve it to the noblest purposes,

PSALM L. POR. I.

1. The Lord, the judge before his throne, bids the whole earth draw nigh,
The nations near the rising sun, and near the western sky
2. No more shall bold blasphemers say, Judgment will ne'er begin;
No more abuse his long delay, to impudence and sin.
3. Thron'd on a cloud our God shall come, bright flames prepare his way,
Thunder and darkness, fire and storm, lead on the dreadful day.
4. Heav'n from above his call shall hear, attending angels come,
And earth and hell shall know and fear his justice and their doom.

